



# EarthWatch Rhode Island



## **Topic: DEM Beach Closures – Behind the Scenes**

**Aired July 2, 2006; Filmed at Scarborough State Beach, Narragansett and RIDOH Lab, Providence**

### **Background:**

Last summer, 21 Rhode Island beaches were posted with warnings or closed for at least one day because the water was contaminated and last week the Department of Health closed 13 beaches because of heavy rainfall. The federal government has strengthened beach standards and developed faster laboratory testing protocols making beach closures more common today. Most beaches are closed because of high bacteria counts, which can cause urinary tract infections, stomach viruses and other infections. High bacteria counts occur mostly from sewage overflows and storm water run-off after heavy rainfalls, and from waterfowl contamination, particularly at urban swimming areas such as Lincoln Woods.

DEM works with the Department of Health to ensure the health and safety of patrons using bathing beaches. All 120 licensed bathing facilities are monitored, including 10 state beaches. Here's the process for State beaches:

- DEM submits operating plan to DOH showing beach open schedule and operating hours
- DOH determines frequency of sampling based on operating schedules, beach location, etc.
- DEM contracts with the lab - Rhode Island Analytical - who takes samples and tests the water. Results are available within 24 hours. (DOH also takes random samples to compare results).
- High levels are immediately reported to DOH who makes the decision to close the beach
- Advisory are issued by both DEM and DOH beaches (closure time vary depending on the
- Retesting begins immediately



**A sample of beach water waits to be tested at Rhode Island Department of Health.**

The state hopes to reduce the number of beach closures 50% by 2010 by better management of stormwater, reducing or treating sewage overflows from wastewater

treatment facilities, improving septic system management, phasing out cesspools and eliminating discharges from boats.

Channel 10 viewers can help by keeping common pollutants like pesticides, pet waste, grass clippings and automotive fluids off the ground and out of storm water drains. And most importantly, do not feed seagulls and waterfowl at the beach.

**Interviews:**

- Michael Sullivan, Director, DEM
- Larry Mouradjian, Acting Associate Director, DEM Bureau of Natural Resources
- Dr. Ernest Julian, Rhode Island Department of Health

**Link to more information:**

DEM Homepage [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov), Timely Topics, Beach Closures

DOH Beach Closure Site: <http://www.ribeaches.org/>



**Channel 10 NBC interviews the Director of the RIDEM, Dr. Michael R. Sullivan, on the background of beach closures at Scarborough State Beach.**